a Little Golden Book

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Disney's Beauty and the Beast

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Disney's Beauty and the Beast

Adapted by Teddy Slater
Illustrated by Ric Gonzalez and Ron Dias

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Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there lived a young prince in a beautiful castle. Although he had everything his heart desired, the prince was spoiled and selfish.

One winter's night an old beggar woman asked the prince for shelter from the bitter cold. In return she offered him a rose. Repulsed by the old woman, the unkind prince turned her away.

The woman warned him not to be deceived by appearances, since beauty is found within. But when the prince dismissed her again, the old woman's ugliness melted away to reveal a beautiful enchantress.

The prince tried to apologize, but it was too late. The enchantress knew there was no love in his heart.

As punishment, the enchantress transformed the prince into a hideous beast. Then she placed a powerful spell on the castle and all who lived there.

The rose she had offered was an enchanted rose. It would bloom until the prince was twenty-one. If he could learn to love and be loved before the last petal fell, then the spell would be broken. If not, he would remain a beast for all time.

Ashamed of his monstrous form, the Beast hid inside the castle. A magic mirror was his only window to the outside world.

As the years passed, he fell into despair. He did not believe that anyone could ever love him.

Slowly the rose began to wither.

In a nearby village there lived a young girl named Belle. She was very beautiful. But Belle, unlike the other girls in the village, cared only for her books and always felt out of place.

Her father, Maurice, was a reader of books, too. But while Belle read about adventure and romance, her father studied technical books. Maurice was an inventor—a genius, according to Belle; a crackpot, according to the townsfolk.

"Belle is even stranger than her father," the villagers whispered. "Her nose is always in a book, and her head is in the clouds."

Gaston the hunter, who was the handsomest man in town, wanted to make Belle his wife. No matter how many times she turned him down, Gaston would not take no for an answer. He was determined to wed the lovely Belle, even though she thought he was a brainless brute.

One cold day Maurice hitched his horse Phillipe to a wagon and set off to show his latest invention at a faraway fair.

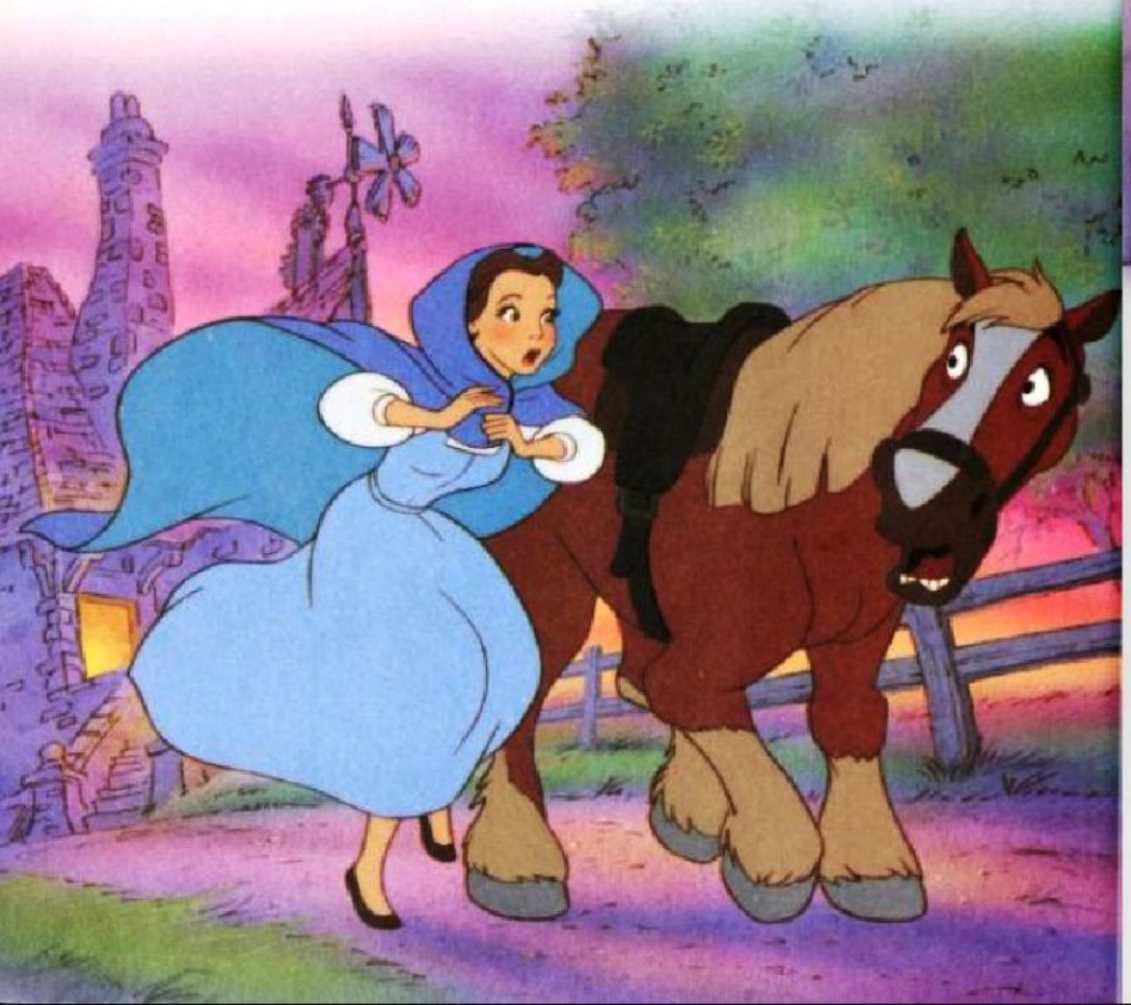
With his mind on the fair, Maurice became lost in a misty forest. As an icy wind whistled through the trees, he suddenly heard an even more disturbing sound...the howling of wolves! Phillipe bolted, and Maurice fell to the ground. To escape the wolves, the frightened man ran deeper and deeper into the woods.

He came to a castle that seemed deserted and stumbled inside. There Maurice was greeted by Mrs. Potts the teapot, Cogsworth the mantelclock, and Lumiere the candelabra. But before he had time to marvel over these strange creatures, an even stranger one appeared—the Beast!

When Maurice stared at the Beast in horror, the Beast howled angrily. Then he scooped Maurice up and carried him off to a dungeon.

Meanwhile, Phillipe had made his way back home. Belle took one look at the riderless horse and knew something awful had happened to her father.

"Phillipe! Take me to him!" she cried, leaping astride the exhausted horse. Without a pause, the animal thundered off toward the woods.



When she reached the castle, Belle burst inside and searched frantically for her father. The enchanted objects led her to the tower, but just as she found Maurice, the Beast appeared. Belle let out a terrified gasp at the hideous sight of the Beast.

When she realized that this was Maurice's captor, Belle begged the Beast to free her father. When he refused, she bravely offered herself in Maurice's place.

"No, Belle!" Maurice cried, even as the Beast said, "Done!"

Her heart pounding, Belle ran out of the castle, mounted Phillipe, and fled into the night. But a pack of wolves soon had the girl and her horse surrounded. Belle was helpless. She knew that death was near.

Suddenly the Beast was there, throwing the wolves aside. A terrible snarling and howling sounded as the Beast and the wolves battled for their lives. At last the wolves ran off into the woods, but the Beast lay in the snow, badly injured.

Back at the castle, Belle gently bound the Beast's wounds. Gentle as she was, the Beast roared in agony.

"I barely touched you," said Belle. Then she saw a look of pain on his face. "I forgot to thank you for saving my life," she added softly.

The Beast only grunted in reply. But when Belle turned away, the hint of a smile could be seen on his face.

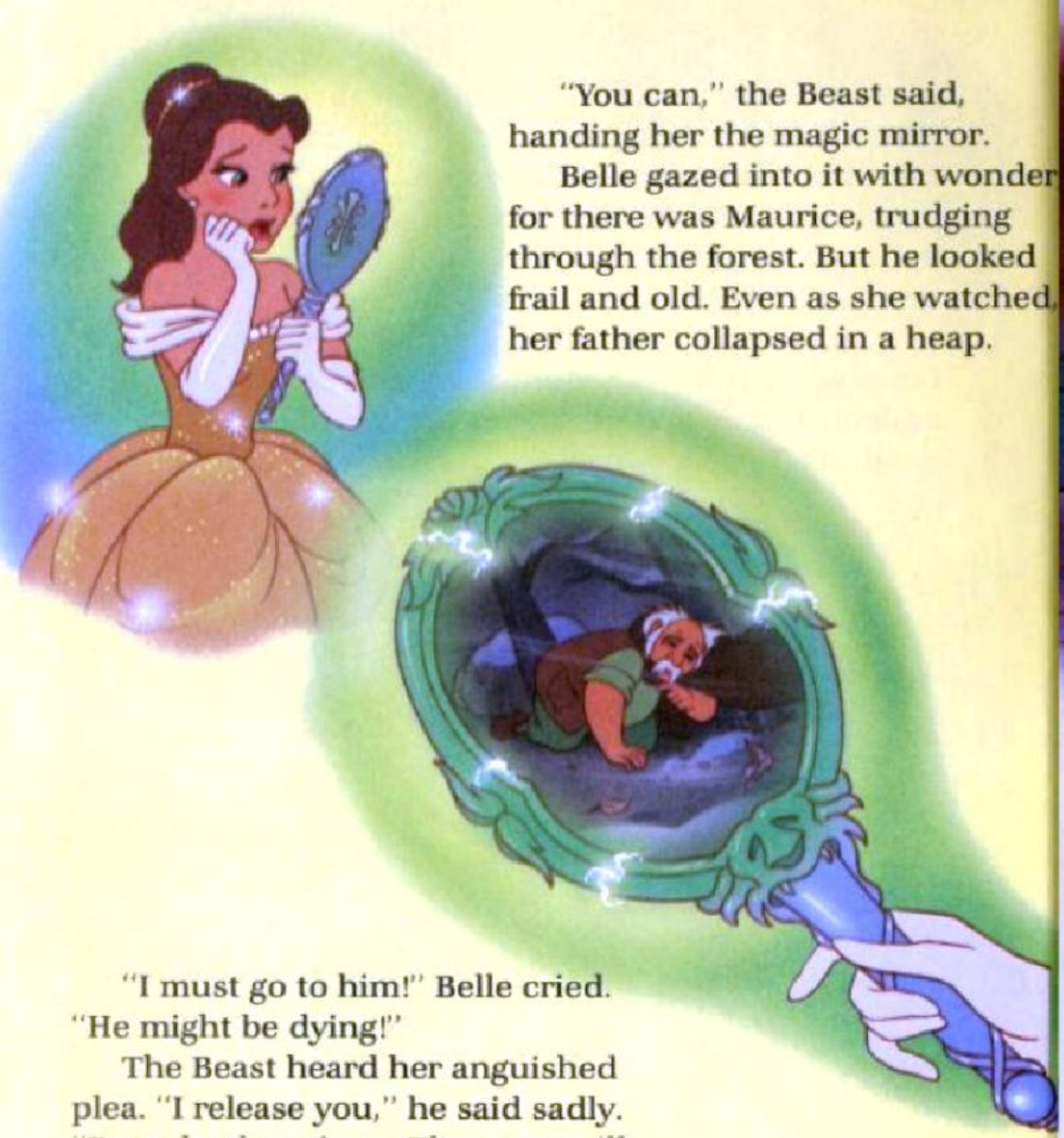
In the days that followed, the Beast tried to be a proper host. He showed Belle his library, where they read together, and she, in return, began to teach him how to act like a gentleman.

"Perhaps it isn't too late," Cogsworth whispered to Mrs. Potts and her son, Chip the teacup. "If Belle could only love the Beast, this dreadful spell might yet be broken."

The winter passed pleasantly for Belle and the Beast. Belle thought of the Beast as her dearest friend. He thought of little but the beautiful Belle.

One night while Belle was teaching him to dance, the Beast stammered, "Belle, are you happy here—with me?"

"Yes," said Belle without hesitation, but the Beast saw a trace of sadness in her eyes. Then Belle added, "If only I could see my father again, even for a minute."



"You can," the Beast said, handing her the magic mirror.

Belle gazed into it with wonder for there was Maurice, trudging through the forest. But he looked frail and old. Even as she watched, her father collapsed in a heap.

"I must go to him!" Belle cried. "He might be dying!"

The Beast heard her anguished plea. "I release you," he said sadly. "But take the mirror. Then you will always have a way to look back and remember me."

With the magic mirror to guide her, Belle soon found her father. But their happy reunion was cut short with a pounding on their cottage door.

"We've come to take Maurice to Maison des Loons," announced Monsieur D'Arque, director of the village's insane asylum.

"No!" Belle cried. "My father isn't crazy."

Gaston's friend Lefou stepped forward. "Maurice has been raving that you were imprisoned by a hideous beast," he said. "Only a crazy man would tell such a tale."

"But it's true," Belle protested. Her worried eyes searched the angry crowd and lit on Gaston. "Gaston!" she cried. "You know my father isn't crazy. Tell them."

Gaston quickly drew Belle to one side, and he whispered that he might be able to calm the crowd—if Belle would promise to marry him.

"Never!" Belle exclaimed. "And my father is not crazy. There really is a Beast, and I can prove it." She turned to the crowd. "Look in this mirror and see."

The townspeople looked at the Beast's reflection and grew frightened.

Gaston was furious. His plan would be foiled. "We must hunt down this savage animal!" he cried, stirring up the mob. "Who's with me?"

"We are!" answered the villagers.

After locking Belle and her father in the cellar of the cottage, the villagers rode off to storm the Beast's castle.

Luckily Chip, Mrs. Potts's son, had stowed away in Belle's saddlebag. After the villagers were gone, he used Maurice's latest invention to release Belle and her father from the cellar.

By the time Belle reached the castle, the townspeople had broken in. Gaston and the Beast were in a mortal duel on the castle roof. The Beast managed to knock Gaston's weapon from his hand. Then there was nothing to stop him from killing Gaston—nothing but the Beast's own humanity.

Gaston screamed for mercy. The Beast granted it and turned away from his foe. Then Belle watched helplessly as Gaston rose up and plunged a knife into the Beast's back.

The Beast roared in pain, frightening Gaston. Backing away from the wounded Beast, the hunter lost his footing and fell off the roof into the fog below.

Brokenhearted, Belle flew to the Beast's side.

"You came back," the Beast said weakly. "At least I can see you one last time."

"No! No!" Belle said, sobbing, as she kissed his cheek. "Please don't die....I love you."

At that moment the spell was broken, and in one magical instant, the Beast turned back into his princely self. The enchanted servants returned to their human forms as well.

The castle came alive with rejoicing. Mrs. Potts cried human tears of joy as the handsome young prince gathered the beautiful Belle into his arms. Mrs. Potts, Cogsworth, and Lumiere had not one doubt that the loving couple would live happily ever after.

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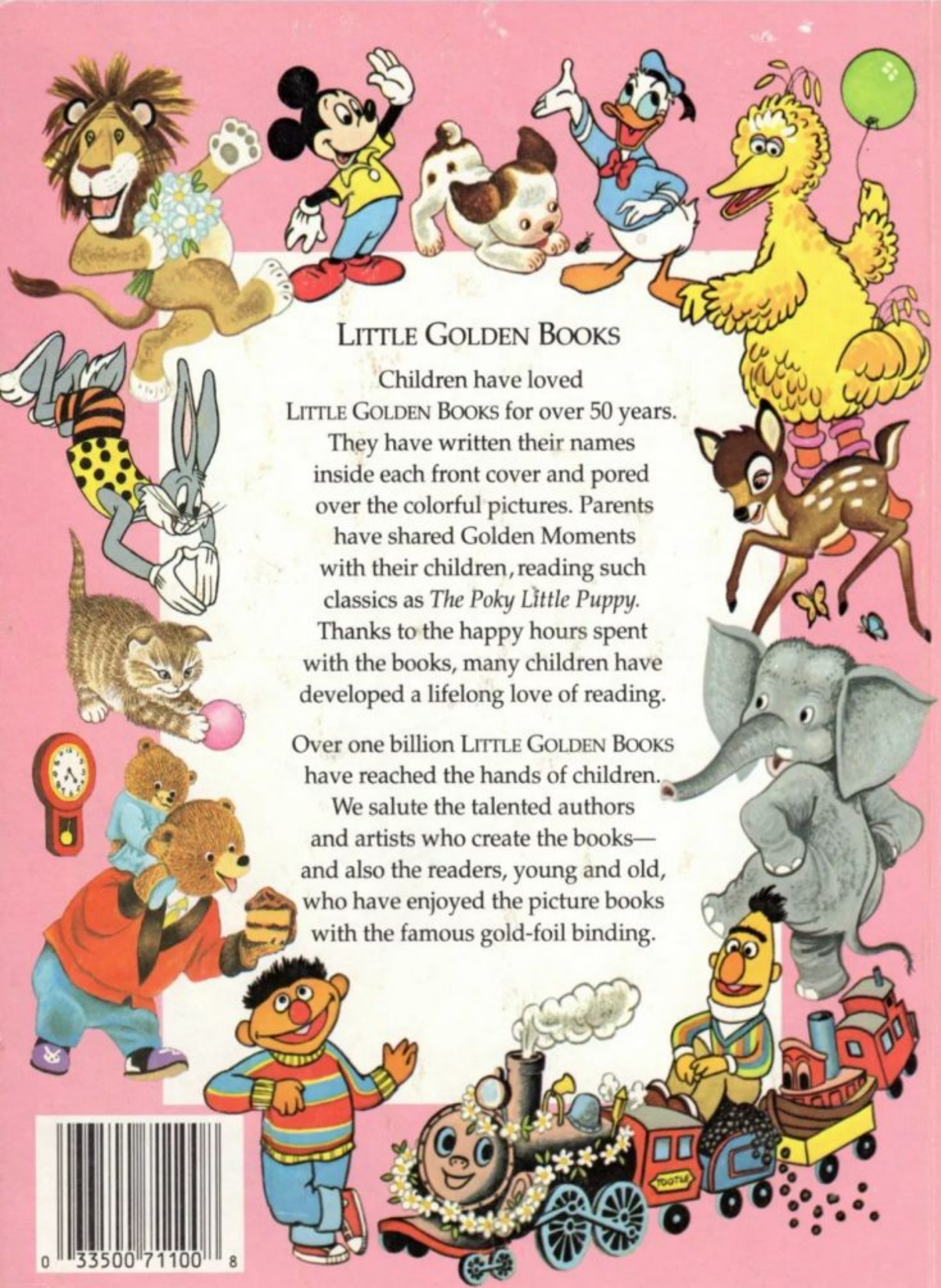

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